

THE BIBLE DOCTRINE OF PRAYER

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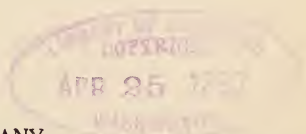


THE
BIBLE DOCTRINE
OF
PRAYER.

✓
BY CHARLES E. SIMMONS.

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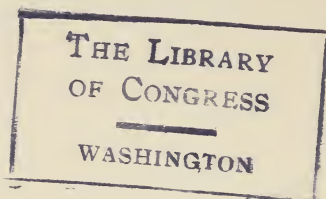
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For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.—Prov. 3:26.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.—Isa. 26:3.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.—Phil. 4:7.

TO MY BELOVED WIFE, WHO THROUGH LONG YEARS OF TRIAL, HAS, ALMOST WITHOUT INTERRUPTION, ENJOYED THE REALIZATION OF THESE PROMISES AS THE INEXPRESSIBLY PRECIOUS FRUIT OF A LIFE OF PRAYER, THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFATORY WORDS.

Having been recently led to study the teachings of the Holy Scriptures on the subject of prayer, I herewith submit some things I have learned.

By way of apology, I must be permitted to say, that although this study has occupied many months, yet the total time spent upon it has been much less than I could have wished. It has been much broken, because only a few minutes at a time could be devoted to the work, owing to the engrossing pursuits of a very busy life. One advantage, however, has accrued from this; it has forced me to get much of my understanding of Scripture from prayerful meditation, rather than from Commentaries and other helps. Yet I do not want it to be understood that I have wholly neglected the teachings of learned Commentators and of other

writers; on the contrary, I have made diligent use of such of them as I had, and owe much to them. Those so used are recognized authorities of high standing; but I have postponed consulting them till after careful meditation on the Word. Not having knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek languages, my study has been confined to the English text. However, I have sought to know how scholars understood the meaning of the original text of the passages I have been considering. When, therefore, I venture to speak of the rendering of any text, it is not of my own knowledge, but what some authority (and that not a mean one) says. I think that in the rendering of doubtful or obscure texts, or those about which scholars differ, one who has diligently and prayerfully studied the Word with a fair degree of intelligence, and has brought to bear upon it all the light he has obtained respecting the revealed character of God, may fairly be entitled to choose the rendering which seems to him to be most in harmony with the mind of God. This rule I have seldom found occasion

to apply; but when such occasion has arisen, the choice has been made.

The Scripture quotations in this paper are all from the Revised Version.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of three very dear friends to whom the work has been entrusted to secure some sort of literary finish. As they are in no way responsible for anything said herein, I leave them unnamed.

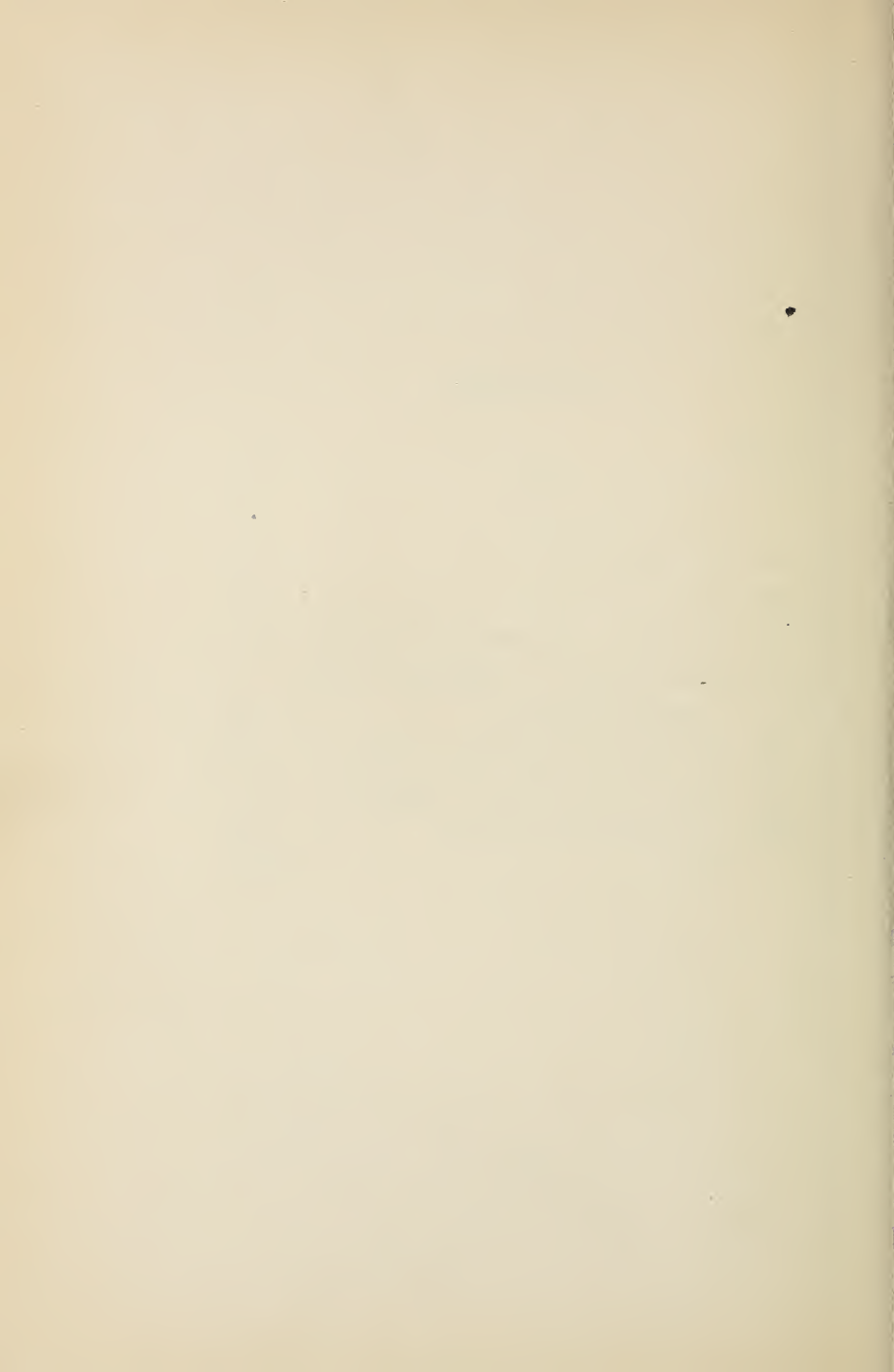
I have thought best not to encumber the book with foot note references to authors consulted. Of course I have adopted the views of many writers, but while I have not consciously *copied* their mode of expression, I have not sought to make mere verbal changes for the sake of avoiding a charge of plagiarism.

S.

Oak Park, Ill., February, 1892.

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I.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

A number of words in the original Hebrew and Greek Scripture are rendered in our English Bible, "pray," "prayed," "praying," "prayer." Each of these seem to convey, in whole or in part, the same meaning. This meaning is, doubtless, in many respects, deeper and more complete than we are wont to attach to the English words "prayer," "praying," etc. Underlying them all is the consciousness of want or need, of earnest desire. This desire takes the form of supplication for its fulfillment or of intercession for others. The words often imply a sort of pouring out, or, as it were, an overflowing of supplication.

But Scripture examples and the trend of Biblical teaching as to prayer show plainly that the thought is incomplete, un-

less other elements are added, such as adoration of God, praise of His perfections and works, thanksgiving for His mercies and gifts, and confession of sins. With supplication for personal needs will also be mingled intercession for others. All these are necessary elements of prayer, but it does not follow that all must, or often will, be in any one prayer.

Too much there is of attempt in many public prayers, so called, to cover the whole range of the elements of prayer without regard to time, place, or present need. Too little of real praying and too much of "making a prayer by elaborate phrasemongering." (Wm. M. Taylor in *Parables of Our Lord*.)

Alas, "All is not prayer which calls itself by that name." (Ibid 421.) The words of adoration are unaccompanied by the self-abasement needed to bring our minds to a proper contemplation of the awful majesty of a Holy God; the thanksgiving is rather self-congratulation like

that of the Pharisee in our Lord's parable; the confession is not followed by any "turning from evil to do well," and not only is the suppliant unprepared for specific answers to his prayers, but he would be appalled by the receipt of such answer.

Prayer—An earnest, zealous asking; the act of offering up to God adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication; the practice of communion with God in devotional address, worship, and supplication. To this we add the words of our Lord: "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers." (John 4:23, R. V.)

What is meant by worship "in spirit" and "in truth" will be considered further on.

Dr. Pope has well said (Theology, p. 333), "Prayer is the universal way of access to God and blessing from Him; without it no other means are effectual." Now it is evident, if we stop to think, that access to God

is not alone by way of asking, nor are all the blessings to be sought such bestowments as are to be received in answer to supplications. The astronomer, who was conscious that he was thinking the thoughts of God when through all the night he studied the wonders of the starry heavens, was having access to God, and his thoughts were true prayers. To contemplate what is revealed to us of the character of God, to meditate upon His perfections, to reverently study His ways in nature, His providential dealings with men and nations, and the wonderful way in which He is governing the world in the interest of the Kingdom He has set up therein—all these are prayers.

It is not consonant with Christ's teachings to believe that through the long night He continued in *supplication* to the Father. Much He had to ask for, doubtless, but He asked only what it was His Father's Will to give. Asking and answer must have been simultaneous, and great stretches of time were

not needed for the asking. How then did He spend the nights which, we are told, were all taken up in prayer? Loving converse, sweet communion, the interchange of lofty thought between Him and His Father, vast stretches into past and future, the affairs of the universe he had made, and above all His present work and mission among men; surely there was enough to fill up those long hours when He was alone with God; *and this was prayer*. I think it was Matthew Henry who quaintly illustrates this subject by saying: "I have a friend and neighbor who is very wealthy, very wise, and vastly agreeable. He is withal of a most generous disposition, very obliging and loves me dearly. To him I resort often, sometimes to borrow, sometimes to ask as a gift what I know he is glad to bestow, now again for advice or instruction, but many a time only for a rare gossip, an entertaining chat." "So," he says, "in all these ways, and for just such ends, do I go to God."

Doubtless supplication seems to many much the more important element of prayer. Our needs so press upon us; our helplessness is so apparent, the future so uncertain, that, to one who has come to feel that outside of himself and things visible there is a *Power* at once benevolent, interested in him, and powerful enough to succor, supply, comfort and guide him, the cry for help, guidance, and supply is spontaneous.

It is much beyond my purpose to attempt to deal with philosophical or theological questions. I am writing for simple Christians who, like myself, cherish traditional beliefs, and are not qualified to consider philosophies; but even such simple folk will be plagued, and hindered from accepting much that they are privileged to receive and enjoy, because of one heresy very prevalent in the church, viz: that the domain of prayer is purely spiritual.

Theology has made its God quite different from the representation of Him, which one gathers from His word, *taking it to mean*

just what it says. One English divine has said, with a wit not quite reverential perhaps, that the modern theologian has “defecated the idea of God to a pure transparency.” If this is an exaggeration, it is true that the speculations about the attributes of an *Unconditioned Godhead*, together with the acceptance by theologians of the deductions of science from the observation of a fixed order in nature, have put God so far away, and so imbued Christians with the spirit of Naturalism, that supernatural interference in the realm of nature seems to many an impossibility. The scripture examples of prayer for such interference, and apparent answers thereto are disposed of by saying that, in the unscientific age of the occurrence of these events, men knew nothing of a scientific order in nature, and conceived of God as constantly interfering with the operations of the forces He had set at work in the world of matter, etc.

This conception would, of course, pre-

vent accurate examination of the facts. They would be reported as they seemed, not as they really were, because the trend of thought would agree with the apparent occurrence. Such an explanation, if accepted, effectually disposes of all miracles, both of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, and leaves a few healings, and castings out of demons (only mind cures in fact) as the sole residuum of real supernatural events in the whole record. So many of the leaders of religious thought in the modern church have accepted this view that the whole body of Christians, with but few exceptions, has become leavened with naturalism.

How will we take the statements of the record? Spurgeon, when once applied to for an exposition of a certain text, replied, "It means what it says." A vice of interpretation, very prevalent just now, is to "spiritualize" everything. Spurgeon gives the correct rule for plain readers; which

is, when the language is not obviously figurative, interpret as it reads. When figure is manifest, interpret by the usual rules for discovering the meanings of such figures.

Can prayer change the divine purpose? The character of God must indeed be unchangeable but His character must compel Him (so to speak) to assume and maintain an attitude toward each man determined by that man's condition. So far as such condition is dependent upon the man's free will, it will change as his will changes without reference to God's will; and His attitude must undergo a corresponding change. His purpose, which is ever one of perfect benevolence, remains unchanged, and in obedience to the "law of the end," all intervening events will be shaped to fulfil that purpose.

The objection arising from the foreknowledge of God is met by the consideration that, if He does foreknow all events, He must, also, know of the need for change

of attitude, so that the change itself is foreseen and purposed.

Or, as Dr. Delitzsch puts it, (Biblical Psychology translated by Wallis, Edinburgh, 1885), "Scripture acknowledges a supra-mundane God, exalted above the world which began in time, who from everlasting willed the world, and in creative effectuation of this will, realized the world in time; a God whose eternal omniscience comprehends not alone that which is general, but also that which is most special of this world, thus eternally willed and temporally to be made actual; and not alone surveyed all possibilities arising out of the use of freedom by the personal beings to be created, but moreover, looked through the future realization of this free-being, even into its most individual and secret nature; a God who, in virtue of this all-comprehending and all-penetrating knowledge, exercising that formative power over the mundane relations which appertained to Him, without

qualifying the freedom of the creature, moulded this eternally willed future world into a whole, issuing forth for the triumph of His love comprehended into a unity in Christ (Eph. 1:10) the everlasting Son prepared for incarnation."

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us who is against us? He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:31, 32, R. V.)

In view of the many assurances of the Father's care for our temporal needs, and that He knoweth that we have need of all these things before we ask, we are taught that anxious thought about them is evidence of a distrust of his love (cf Matt. 6:19-34). Take to heart the positive promise that if we are making the kingdom of God and His righteousness the first objects of our seeking, all these (temporal) things will be added; then if conscious that you are mak-

ing the things and interests of the kingdom your first care and the prime objects of your pursuit, can you doubt that your prayer for daily bread will be granted and that all your needs, both spiritual and temporal, will be met with ample supply?

II.

WHO MAY PRAY?

Are there essential limitations to the right of prayer? The answer to this must obviously be in the affirmative, notwithstanding the apparent positiveness of certain promises and assurances of the Word, of which more hereafter.

Two misconceptions need to be guarded against here: (1) That God will listen only to the *cry for mercy* from the sinner; (2) A bald and slavish literalism, which takes the positive promises that have been referred to, as unconditioned, save upon acceptance or belief. That there are other essential conditions mainly resting in the character of the suppliant will be shown hereafter.

As to the prayers of those who are not *of the household of faith* we must believe that every faintest aspiration Godward, every cry

to Him for help, even though inarticulate, will be received at Heaven's gate, will reach God's ear and heart, and will be responded to with mercies and blessings conferred or tendered. No other view is consonant with the revealed character of God.

“A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax (‘dimly burning wick’ margin) shall He not quench; He shall bring forth judgment in truth.” (Isa 42:3, R. V.)

What sweeter or truer application can be made of these words, than to apply them to God's treatment of any heavenly aspiration that may arise in the souls of His wandering children? The words, “This man receiveth sinners,” with which His enemies sought to reproach Jesus, is His chief glory. To Nicodemus He said, “For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.” (John 3:17, R. V.)

His mission is not now one of judgment, but only one of mercy. He will seek to save by every possible means. Will He

not then nurse, help, strengthen and guide any conscious lifting of the soul Godward? The feeblest pulsation of life gives hope of restoration. The figures of the bruised reed and smoking flax are most significant. A reed is strong only in the absolute integrity of its tissue. The light, slender cylinder has considerable strength while unbroken, but split or bruise it ever so little, and a weaker thing could hardly be found. Notice the marginal reading of the prophetic description in Isaiah, "dimly burning wick"—a lamp almost gone out, giving forth smoke, where there should be light! But even these very weak things have some life. Let no ungentle breeze blow upon this bruised reed, and the processes of nature may heal the bruise and restore the strength. Supply oil to this lamp, instead of quenching the expiring spark, and it will flame out anew.

The human mind seems ever prone to misconceptions of God's character and of His relations to men, particularly when

making creeds and formulating theological dogmas. The occasional use by Paul of the word "adoption," a true view of the awfulness of sin and rebellion against a Holy God, and failure to give due weight to the revelation of the love, mercy and long-suffering of God, have led us to think of the sinner as so separated from the Father of us all, that he is merely an outcast, an alien, entitled only to come begging that his forfeited life may be spared. One welcomed and sought after, it is true, but for whom there is no love, no tenderness in the Father's heart. How different the picture Christ gives us in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost money, and the prodigal son. These parables must be taken as illustrative rather than symbolic: as symbols, or types, they will quickly break down against other truths of the Word; as illustrations, they will be found most helpful to an understanding of an aspect of God's character, and of His attitude toward men, of which no conception would be possible

without their aid. Even seeming to be forgetful of the many and wiser sheep, though in the sheepfold still needing His care, the Shepherd goes forth to seek the one that has willfully wandered, though wandering still. To the woman the one piece of money becomes supremely dear *because it is lost*; but above all, touching, tender and true is the story of the wandering son. He is heir no longer, for he has anticipated his part of the inheritance, and it is utterly exhausted. If he return, he can add nothing to the family store, but he is a son still. *He* does not think so. The most he can believe of his father's love is that it will give him a servant's place, and that where once he had the position, privileges and honors of a son, he may have at least food, raiment and shelter in return for service. How little he knew of that father's heart. How that heart, though satisfied as to the home-keeping son by a perfect service, had all these years yearned with infinite tenderness after the unfaithful one; and when he returns he

will not be received as a servant, but as an honored guest, entitled to wear the robe of honor, to receive the signet ring, pledge of the faith of the host to care for and guard him, and be shod as a free man. There are other fine illustrations in the story to emphasize and point the father's love. His sight strained in eager looking sees the returning wanderer "afar off." He ran (literally *leaped*) to meet him, and fervently embraced and kissed him (for such is the force of the original).

Here anything like a parallel with the case of the returning sinner ceases. Our Elder Brother is not angry that we are received and honored, but rather joins in the hearty welcome. He not only does not begrudge the entertainment provided for the guest, but is content, nay, glad to divide the inheritance with the prodigal who has wasted his portion, not only to make him co-heir with Himself in the glory, honor and power which is His right, but to make him one with Him so that the Father's approval

of His perfect service may spread over and be appropriated to the other. Does not this sufficiently explain Paul's reference to the right of adoption?

Always a son, but a son who had lost his rights in the household, his share of the family wealth. Now by adoption he is restored to his rights and those privileges which he has forfeited.

III.

DUTY OF PRAYER.

We find but little said by Christ by way of direct command or exhortation to pray. His example said more than words could, that prayer was as necessary to Him who sought to work His Father's will, as was the air He breathed; and we know that either His example or precept wrought in His immediate followers such a spirit of prayer that, after His departure, they, "with one accord, continued steadfastly in prayer," until the Spirit sent them out to preach.

The few specific exhortations of Christ to this duty *not only* have the weight of His personal authority, but bring out strongly one of the main uses of prayer.

One of these, recorded in almost identical language by the three synoptists, was spoken to those who, having beheld His glory on

the Mount of Transfiguration, had gone as far with Him as any could go into the valley of the shadow of death, into which His soul entered on the night of His betrayal. To them, finding their willing spirits yielding to their weak flesh, He had said: "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." (Matt. 26:40, 41.) (Mark 13:33.) (Luke 22:46.) Here two safeguards are set up against entering into (yielding to) temptation, viz: watchfulness and prayer, but since that is not watchfulness which is intermittent, and the watching and prayer are to go together, it follows that what He commands is, an habitual attitude of prayerfulness. He was disappointed that they had permitted the weakness of their physical nature to bring drowsiness to their spirits, at a time when both love and loyalty demanded that they be in watchful sympathy with the struggle between His own flesh and spirit; and He foresaw and warned them that, as they must often engage in such

struggle, they would inevitably yield to the weakness, unless they kept constant watch against the assaults of the enemy, and were prepared to meet them with a call upon God, their only Deliverer. Much the same thought is doubtless expressed in what He had said to the disciples on the preceding day. "But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:36, R. V.) He had been telling them of the last things, and warning them that the end would come suddenly and unexpectedly. "Take heed," He had said, "to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare, for so shall it come upon all." (Luke 21:34-35, R. V.) It *will* prove a snare; if it find you unprepared to stand before the Son of Man when He, the *Saviour*, shall stand forth the *Judge*; but you cannot be warned in advance so that you may fit

yourself up for this ordeal. Only one way of escape remains for you from the misery and the condemnation that shall fall upon all others that dwell upon the face of the earth, and that way will be found in constant watchfulness and unwearied prayerfulness.

Further on we will see that for one consummation we may, we ought, constantly to pray. That consummation is the coming of our Lord, to complete His work of setting up the Kingdom in righteousness. Of this consummation Christ was here speaking; and doubtless His exhortation to constant praying included this thought; but it must be understood, in the main, as referring to the maintenance of a spirit of watchfulness against the assaults of evil, and of constant looking to God for help to resist them. To the same purpose, and to be understood in the same way, is Paul's exhortation in 1. Thes. 5:17, 18, R. V. "Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you-ward." That is to say, it is the will of

God that, in dependence upon Christ and acceptance of His gifts and grace, the attitude of the soul should be one of constant asking, and asking with such confident expectation, that the prayer and thanks are simultaneous. We do not live a conscious moment in which we do not feel a need. It is God's will that we should feel that *that* need is met in Christ, and such assurance will result in the constant maintenance on our part, of a devotional spirit; at once asking, receiving, and thanking. It is with a view to last things, "the end," that is felt to be "at hand," that Peter said: "Be ye therefore of sound mind, and be sober unto prayer." (1. Pet. 4:7, R. V.) Tyndall's rendering of this text seems most happy: "Be ye therefore discreet and sober, that ye may be apt to prayers." While that of the Authorized Version fails to express the same sense. Soundness of mind, self-control will conduce to such a prayerful frame as should be in believers, having in view the imminence of the end. "This principle is to be held fast," says Cal-

vin, "that ever since Christ first appeared, nothing is left to believers but with minds in suspense, to be always intent upon His second advent," and in this condition of *suspense* it is clear that no state of mind is safe except one of conscious communion with God.

The duty and privilege of prayer are clearly pointed out by Paul in writing to Timothy: "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men." "I desire therefore that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing." (1. Tim. 2:1, 8, R. V.)

And these verses are specially interesting in this connection; the first, because of the use of four words, each being a designation of prayer, but each having a distinct meaning, (1) Entreaties, arising out of wants, distress, or danger; (2) Requests for spiritual blessings; (3) Intercession, that is earnest, personal pleading; (4) Thanksgiving for answers received. The second of these texts

points to the duty, and something of the method of *public prayer*, as well as what is the right spirit for this exercise. Here again the Authorized Version is very unhappy in substituting “doubting” for what should have been rendered “debate,” or, as in Revised Version, “disputing.” Those who are to lead the congregation in prayer should be able to lift up holy hands, and not let anything of a wrathful, or disputatious spirit enter into their utterances. It would hardly seem that such an exhortation could be necessary, yet may we not all recall prayers that have been harangues full of “wrath and debate?”

IV.

CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER.

Notwithstanding the readiness of God to respond to the feeblest aspiration of the human soul for things divine, it is manifest that there must be some belief in Him and in His power and readiness to help, or there could be no such aspiration.

Frederic Harrison has directed the keen shafts of his wit against the attempt to connect religious aspirations or emotions, with a being of whom we can only be conscious as existent, but as utterly unthinkable or unknowable. "By their fruits you shall know them," he says, "is true of all sorts of religion."

"And what are the fruits of the Unknowable but the Dead Sea apples? Obviously it can teach us nothing, influence us in

nothing, for the absolutely incalculable and unintelligible can give us neither ground for action nor thought. Nor can it touch any one of our feelings, but that of wonder, mystery and sense of human helplessness. Helpless, objectless, apathetic wonder at an inscrutable infinity may be attractive to a metaphysical divine; but it does not sound like a working force in the world. Does the Evolutionist commune with the Unknowable in the secret silence of his chamber? Does he meditate on it, saying, ‘in quietness and confidence shall be your strength’?

“One would like to know how much of the Evolutionist’s day is consecrated to seeking the Unknowable in a devout way, and what the religious exercises might be. How does the man of science approach the All-Nothingness? And the microscopist? And the embryologist? And the vivisectionist! What do they learn about it? What strength or comfort does it give them? Nothing—nothing! It is an ever-

present conundrum, to be everlastingly given up, and perpetually to be asked of one's self and one's neighbors, but without waiting for the answer." * * * *

"A child comes up to our Evolutionist friend, looks up in his wise and meditative face, and says, 'Oh, wise and great master, what is religion?'" And he tells that child, 'It is the presence of the Unknowable.'" 'But what,' asks the child, 'am I to believe about it?' 'Believe that you can never know anything about it?' 'But how am I to learn to do my duty?' 'Oh! for duty you must turn to the known, to moral and social science.' And a mother wrung with agony for the loss of her child, or the wife crushed by the death of her children's father, or the helpless and the oppressed, the poor and the needy, men, women and children, in sorrow, doubt and want, longing for something to comfort them and to guide them, something to believe in, to hope for, to love and to worship—they come to our

philosopher, and they say, "Your men of science have routed our old teachers. What religious faith do you give us in its place?" And the philosopher replies (his full heart bleeding for them), 'Think on the Unknowable.' " (Religion, Spencer-Harrison, pp. 52-53.)

Even without the declaration of the Word we would be constrained to say: "And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him." (Heb. 11:6, R. V.)

Obviously, emphasis must be laid on the last part of this text. Nothing can have the faintest resemblance to religion, which does not recognize a chain of sympathy between man and the being whom he calls God. On one side at least, veneration and dependence, on the other side a positive influence, and such vital potency as is possessed by organic beings. In other words, man cannot worship, pray to, or in any way *come*

unto a being that he does not feel to be touched with his needs and in sympathy with his aspirations—in short, “a rewarder of them that seek after Him.”

Do we need a definition of *faith*? It would indeed seem absurd to define a word so familiar and of such common use, but may not our very familiarity with it render its meaning nebulous and uncertain? We are apt to think that the definition in Heb. 11:1, R. V., “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen,” is complete, and excludes any other meaning, but a little reflection will convince us to the contrary. Nevertheless, the definition is of great value both for its comprehensiveness and perspicuity, especially as it appears in the margin of the R. V. where we have “the giving substance to” for “the assurance of” and “test” for “proving.” The meaning is so clear that exposition seems unnecessary.

Words in common use nearly synonymous with faith, such as *trust* and *confidence*, give

us an understanding of its Scriptural meaning. We trust (perhaps with some misgivings) the institution to which we commit precious possessions, or the man to whom we entrust care of dear ones. So we are called upon to entrust to God the care of our dearest interests, and not with misgivings, but with assurance that He can and will take good care of them, and relieve us of the necessity of anxiety for them.

“O ye of little faith,” “Be not therefore anxious.” (Mat. 6:31.) “In nothing be anxious.” (Phil. 4:6.) “Casting all your anxiety upon Him (God), because He careth for you.” (1 Pet. 5:7, R. V.)

This involves a *confident expectation* that God will meet our need. Such trust and confidence must have a foundation, and that foundation is the assent of the mind to the statements of God and the necessary deductions from the revelation of His character on the ground of their manifestly inherent truthfulness; that is to say, we come in some way to understand somewhat of the

character of God. This knowledge we compare with statements said to have been made by His authority, as proceeding from Him. The agreement of the two, character and statement, makes the truth of the latter manifest and secures the assent of the mind thereto.

From the assent of the mind, secured by this correspondence between the character of God and the statements of His Word, faith passes on to belief in the statements and promises of the Word resting solely and implicitly upon the accepted authority and veracity of that Word. It has now passed beyond mere mental assent and becomes trust and confidence.

“The Lord shall be thy *confidence*, and shall keep thy feet from being taken.” (Prov. 3:26) now describes the condition of one who has attained to this degree of faith. The trust and confidence, which it is the duty and privilege of the Christian to feel, is an assured rest of mind upon the veracity, integrity, justice, faithfulness and, above all, the

love of God; such a trust and confidence as will lead us to put all our interests, all our cares, and the guidance of thoughts and conduct into His hands. Is this degree of trust and confidence, rare though it may be, so great a thing to demand? The whole structure of society from the family unit to the nation is built upon mutual *trust*, and that trust has no other foundation than confidence in man's integrity. In the common walks of life we are daily, hourly, indeed continually trusting in man for the conservation of even our vital interests, and the simplest of social operations cannot be carried on without such trust.

If we conceive of God as holy and true, then must His integrity and veracity be absolute and perfect. Is it too much then to demand of us at least the degree of trust and confidence which we repose in fallible and imperfect men?*

* That a self-revelation of the character of God is essential to such faith is manifest from the following considerations. In the present state of knowledge the evidence of a fixed scientific order in nature is practically irresistible.

Let us pass to the consideration of a few texts bearing upon the faith to be exercised in prayer: "Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need." (Heb. 4:16, R. V.) "In whom, (Christ Jesus our Lord, v. 11) we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him." (Eph. 3:12, R. V.)

These teach that our faith produces a bold-

Whether such order proceeds from the unremitting activity of a supreme will, or results from an established code of natural laws, it is apparent that recognized phenomena do not form a sufficient basis whereon to predicate a belief that God, if he be admitted to have formed the worlds and to govern them, had or has a benevolent purpose therein; if the slow and somewhat uncertain processes of evolution by which mankind is being lifted to higher physical, mental and moral conditions do point dimly to a being above us who "makes for righteousness," he is far too impersonal to awaken any expectation that his active benevolence will be exercised toward us as individuals.

It would seem, then, that we must look to written revelation alone for evidence that God is moved by a benevolent purpose toward the *individual objects of His creation*. The history of mankind, although it discloses a manifest progress upward in social order, etc., would, unless studied in connection with such written revelation, afford us no surer ground for such belief than do natural phenomena. *The sole basis therefore for confidence in God as a hearer and answerer of prayer is in the written word of God.*

ness in approach to God in prayer—that is, that we may use a freedom born of an assurance that we will meet with a gracious reception, and favorable consideration; (a) because our Great High Priest is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” and (b) because the church (of which we are parts) is now commissioned to make known the manifold wisdom of God, as purposed and revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord, in whom “we have—access in confidence,” because this eternal purpose has been revealed to us. (See context.)

Thus we learn that the faith which is an essential prerequisite to effectual prayer must be constant, unwavering, and complete; to doubt is not to disbelieve, but to lean to unbelief, to be uncertain; now saying, “yes;” now, “no.” The figure used by James is striking. The wave ever advancing and receding, never at rest, is a fit picture of the mind of the doubter. He is not a hypocrite, but is double-minded (literally “two-souled,”) one whose affections are divided between

God and the world, between faith and unbelief. Let not such a one think "that he shall receive anything of the Lord." "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Matt. 21:21, 22, R. V.) "Therefore I say unto you, all things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them." (Mark 11:24, R. V.)

The incident with which these verses are connected, was used by our Lord to point to the possibility of most extraordinary achievements of faith; (see context) and the texts themselves, particularly the one from Mark, suggest what must seem to many believers a most advanced stand in faith, namely, the acceptance by faith of the thing asked for, simultaneously with the asking. The atti-

tude of the believer seems to be this: Relying upon the assurance that "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him"; (Matt. 6:8) and believing that prayer is but the act of acceptance, he does accept in the act of asking, and reckons that, (without visible sign,) as accomplished, which he has sought.

These several considerations teach us what elements of faith are required as the basis of accepted prayer; (a) belief in the existence of God, and that He is possessed of consciousness, intelligence and will; (b) belief that this God stands to us in the relationship of a father to his children; is conscious of our need, sympathizes with us because of that need, and is both able and willing to respond to it; (c) belief that He has appointed prayer as the means of access to Him; that He has given gracious assurances that He will hear and answer; that He has promised certain gifts and graces to be received through asking, and has inspired in us a trust and confidence that leads us to commit *all*

our wishes to the determination of His infinite wisdom and love; (d) a confiding and affectionate belief in the person and work of Christ as the revelation of the character and will of God, through whom our character is transformed, and His will wrought in us; (e) this faith has in it boldness, or freedom of approach, expectation, confidence, and, finally, a triumphant acceptance upon the authority of God's Word alone. May He grant to us all that we may attain thereunto.

V.

FORGIVENESS AS A CONDITION OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER.

If the establishment and maintenance of a relation of sonship to God, is the basis upon which rests our expectation of answer to prayer for all needed blessings, how important that we should know of everything likely to prevent that consummation. Sin is what separates us from God. Sin can be removed by Him alone, and only in answer to our prayer for forgiveness. That our Lord has named, with peculiar emphasis, one thing to be done by him who prays for forgiveness, and has named it as a condition indispensable to forgiveness, is a sufficient intimation that this condition should be carefully considered.

In that discourse which has not inaptly been called the "Inaugural address of the

Kingdom of Heaven," we find our Lord putting into the mouth of his disciples the petition. "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matt. 6:12.) It is significant also that the only other form of prayer He has left us, that of Luke 11, has a plea in substance identical with that of Matt. 6:12. Notice that He follows the form of prayer of Matt. 6 with an amplification of this point and no other.

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14, 15, R. V.)

Let us first consider why this condition needed to be so much emphasized, and then endeavor to get its full import.

The history of our race teaches us that one of the strongest of human passions is the desire for revenge. The great poet recognized this when he wrote, "To err is human, to forgive divine;" as if he had

said, "so impossible is it for a human being to truly forgive an injury, that the power and willingness to forgive must be recognized as a faculty exclusively divine." Doubtless the experience of each one of us confirms this view. Not that an unregenerate man has never forgiven, but that the tendency to remain unforgiving, and to seek revenge, is almost irresistible. So insidious, too, is the tendency that many Christians who cherish strong animosities are either unconscious of it, or justify themselves, and quiet their consciences, by ingenious sophistries.

Before proceeding to an exposition of the passages before cited I will group them with the other statements of our Lord on this subject, and add various cognate texts.

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matt. 6:12, R. V.)

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if ye forgive not men their tres-

passes, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14, 15, R. V.)

"And forgive us our sins; for we ourselves also forgive every one that is indebted to us." (Luke 11:4, R. V.)

"And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any one, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." (Mark 11:25, R. V.)

"Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou besoughtest me: Shouldest not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee? And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." (Matt. 18:32-35, R. V.)

"But love your enemies, and do them good, and lend, never despairing; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Most High: For He is kind toward

the unthankful and evil. Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful. And judge not, and ye shall not be judged: And condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: release, and ye shall be released: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." (Luke 6:35-38, R. V.)

"And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you." (Eph. 4:32, R. V.)

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye." (Col. 3:13, R. V.)

Now, let us look at the meaning of the word "forgive." The standard New Testament word for "forgive" and the one employed in all of these passages (except Luke, 36:37, correctly rendered "release" in R.

V.) has the meaning *to send away or dismiss*. From this comes the meaning *to remit* and *remission* as applied to sins. It is literally a remission as of a fine, a making void as of an obligation, a waiver as of a debt. Now it is evident that our Lord sees in sin both a *wrong* to be *righted* and an *obligation* to be *remitted*. The law demands a service of unbroken and unqualified fidelity. The denial of that service entails a debt and, of course, a debt that could not be met by the debtor. We have the exact picture of this condition in the parable of the unmerciful upper servant, the concluding words of which have been quoted above. (Matt. 18:35-38.)

God's forgiveness removes the blame of the wrong-doing, and waives the debt.

It is true that God's forgiveness must be sought as the servant of the king in the parable besought his master for mercy. It is also true that sincere repentance is a condition of forgiveness, but these are not the truths I seek to point out here. It is the

spirit that moves God to forgive and His *attitude towards the rebellious* to which I wish to direct attention.

In the closing verses of the fifth chapter of Matthew and in Luke 6:35, cited *supra*, this attitude of God is clearly revealed, as well as in many other passages, "That ye may be sons of your Father which is in Heaven." Christ says, "Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you." (Matt. 5:44-45, R. V.) "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (v. 48.) "For He (the Most High) is kind toward the unthankful and evil." (Luke 6:35, R. V.)

It is clearly revealed that God's attitude toward the sinner is one of constant love, unremitting kindness, and *active benevolence*.

That he who would seek forgiveness from God must be possessed of the same spirit toward his enemies, is as clearly taught. It is not enough, as some fondly imagine, that we do not seek to do harm, or even wish no harm to our enemies; rather the

rule is, "But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom. 12:20-21, R. V.)

Let not this be misunderstood, however, as it may easily be. If even unconsciously we cherish a feeling of ill-will toward our enemy, we shall be apt to explain this text, with the context, as teaching that the sure way to be *avenged* on that enemy is, by acts of kindness to intensify his sin against us, so that he may subject himself to severer divine punishment, or, in the words of Augustine, "thou wilt prepare for him the glowing shame of penitence." Both these views are opposed to the last verse; and the true interpretation seems to lie in the quaint gloss of Tyndall: "This means that thou shalt kindle him and make him to love."

We further note that in the true rendering of the Lord's Prayer, as recorded in Matthew, the suppliant speaks of his own act in

the past tense, "As we also have forgiven," and in Luke he speaks of this act of forgiveness as constituting a reason for expecting forgiveness: "For we ourselves also forgive." This forgiveness must also be wholly sincere and complete, as coming "from your hearts." (Matt. 18:35.)

As in God's remission of sins, we also must "send away," "dismiss," "remit," the debts and obligations due to us from the forgiven; and it may well be that this is the hardest thing to do.

Take the case of a brother in the Church who has become alienated from us, who cherishes ill-will, or at least *hard feelings* toward us. He avoids us; omits those kindly greetings which we were accustomed to receive from him; thinks and speaks uncharitably about us; hinders our work for good by opposition, criticism, etc. We will suppose that this conduct is wholly unjustifiable; that all has been done, that can be, to reconcile our brother, but without avail. How shall we feel toward him?

This misconduct of our brother should not cause the least rising of wrath in our hearts, and we should, in thought, feeling and conduct, tender to him complete remission of all debts and obligations created by, or arising out of, his conduct and attitude toward us (see Luke 6:37, 38 *supra*).

Lastly, let us note on this point Paul's exhortation to his Ephesian and Colossian brethren. (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13.)

Our forgiveness should be patterned after that of our Lord. In its spirit it should be kind, tender-hearted and forbearing.

VI.

ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD.

“The right of prayer is obviously limited
* * * to such gifts as God is understood
to be willing to bestow. (Editorial S. S.
Times, Feb. 9th, '89.) We have already
seen that the faith which makes prayer ac-
ceptable embraces a loving trust and con-
fidence that will refer all wants about which
there is no clear revelation of God's will to
the determination of His wisdom and love.
We should have no expectation that our
prayers will be answered, if we are not will-
ing to submit to such determination. In-
finite love could not grant that which would
injure the suppliant, or would hinder God's
gracious work in the world. Christ's words
on the night of His arrest are very instruct-
ive on this point.

“Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech

my Father and He shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26:53, 54, R.V.)

He knew His Father's will perfectly, and the Father could trust Him so far not to thwart that will, that Jesus felt the full assurance that, had He asked even this, it would have been granted; but since His Father's will and His own were in perfect harmony, He *could not ask it*. It is well not to attempt to penetrate too far into the awful mysteries of the Garden of Gethsemane; but even at the risk of seeming presumptuous I venture upon some suggestions respecting the agony and the prayer of Jesus in the Garden. First, let us recall His own very plain and explicit statement, that His life was at His own absolute disposal. "Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to

take it again. This commandment received I from my Father” (John 10:17, 18, R.V.); and also the previously cited text, wherein He declares that at His request the Father would send Him all succor needed to deliver Him from His enemies; but also note what He says in this connection about the Father’s love for Him because of the voluntary surrender of His life in obedience to the Father’s command. So sure is He that the surrender will be made, the command obeyed, that He uses the present tense, speaking of it as a thing then accomplished. The word here rendered, “power,” also means “right,” (as in John 1:12) and may have been used by Him in the double sense. At any rate the meaning is clear. His surrender of life, although in obedience to a command, was absolutely voluntary. But we are elsewhere taught that this obedience was special and peculiar, and was something which He “learned” through one of the processes of His mediatorial work. “Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and

supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered. (Heb. 5:7, 8, R. V.)

While these words describe the whole life of Jesus they have special reference to His final agony, and thus serve as a commentary on the prayer in the garden. The logical arrangement of this Epistle has often been remarked. The Author aims to show the fundamental oneness of the dispensations, and how the later one was a completion and fulfillment of the former; and so he sets forth the Son as the Revealer of God; as greater than other messengers of God; as the representative Man made King over men; and lastly as the Great High Priest to make reconciliation for sin. This High Priest has entered into the holiest place, having made a full and final atonement for the sins of the whole world, and now stands as Intercessor. That He may

be fully qualified for this office, it is essential that He "should be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Then can He be equitable, because He has been tempted according to the likeness there is between us, and that without sin; hence He knows what power of resistance there is in us, and what measure of help we need.

But there is a point at which the type that was in the old priesthood breaks down. In the line of the Aaronic high priest each had to make atonement for himself as well as for the people, for he was sinful. The high priest under the law could be in full sympathy with sinful men, because beset with the same infirmities. The Great High Priest was "without sin;" how then can He be in full sympathy with sinful men? With sinless infirmities He can sympathize, for He was a true man, and under the burden of these; but that He may be able to sympathize with the sinful infirmities, He must in some way, which must ever remain a mystery to us, be placed in such relationship to God

as a sinful man is in. Then He could, indeed He must, offer up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, that He might be raised out of death to become the Eternal High Priest. He feared, not a fear of terror, but the fear of reverence and devoted submission. His greatest desire was, then as always, to do His Father's will; but He knew that a dread hour was approaching in which it was to seem that God had forsaken Him, and left Him to the support of His own unaided powers. Would He in that hour continue His love to man and His trust in God? Might not some spasmodic revolt of His human nature now tried to the utmost, frustrate His whole work? For complete assurance that His strength would be sufficient, His victory complete, and that His work for sinful man would be accepted as thorough and final, He prayed with an earnestness that could brook no denial. And the Father heard Him, not by saving Him from that hour, but by giving the assurance He needed, and

the strength to bear all. Thus He learned by utter self-abnegation a special and peculiar obedience, and could shortly exclaim "It is finished."

That a petition for something which it is God's will to give will be granted is so self-evident that a superficial consideration leads us to wonder why the apostle wrote: "And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him." (1 John 5:14, 15, R. V.) But a careful study of the passage brings out some lessons well worth our while to learn. "Boldness" as we have it in the R. V., is "confidence" in the Authorized, and neither word brings out the full meaning, which is "freedom of speech" (literally "free-spokenness"). Now let us consider the preceding context, noting especially verse 13: "These things have I written unto you that ye may know that ye

have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:13, R. V.)

The declared purpose of the writer of this epistle is to bring joy to the hearts of his brethren, and to make that joy full, or complete (chap. 1:4); and to that end he sets forth many grounds of assurance (chap. 1:7, 2:3, 5:6, 10:29, 3:14,21,22, 4:7,13, &c.), and many tests by which we may know whether we have eternal life.

That we may have this assurance as a direct communication from God, is doubtless God's will; and it is also His will that we should possess all those graces and gifts by which this assurance may be tested, examined, and compared, and which the apostle has laid before us as the grounds of our confidence. These are things expressly promised, or necessarily implied, in the plan and purpose for our complete salvation, which is so clearly revealed in His Word. This consideration naturally begets in us a freedom of speech in asking what we know

God is glad to hear. If it is His will that we have certain gifts because they are for our good and tend to promote the fulfillment of His gracious purpose toward us, of course He will gladly hear us ask for them. The asking proves that our wills are in harmony with His in this matter, hence we are ready for the bestowment of these gifts. All the essential conditions are thus fulfilled, and we "have" before the result itself; and we know that the result is not a coincidence merely, or brought about by the operation of the fixed laws of a natural order, but is obtained through prayer. Like the mother of Samuel, we may now wear a joyful countenance (1 Sam. 1:18), although the actual manifestation may be delayed.

The Lord has in His word revealed to us His will in many points respecting our attainments and privileges. These attainments, and the enjoyment of these privileges, are commonly dependent upon our asking for them. Why this is so we need not stop to inquire. It should be quite enough for

us, that not only is the teaching of the Word clear on this point, but it is corroborated by our experience. "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jas. 4:2), has doubtless been proved true by every Christian, even by those of most exalted attainments. The number and variety of the points upon which the will of God is clearly revealed, is many times greater than is commonly supposed. They are to be found in command, in promise, in exhortation, in examples of asking, in examples of receiving, in thanksgiving for mercies enjoyed, in lamentation for blessings rejected and lost. No doubt the prayerful student will find new ones constantly unfolding as new flowers open in field or garden to welcome each rising sun. But after all, there will ever remain the border land of question and doubt, where man's ignorance, fallibility, and infirmity meet the Spirit of truth and wisdom. Here the loving, trusting child exchanges "boldness" and confidence, for sweet resignation to the Father's will; look-

ing not now to the fulfillment of a specific promise, but restful in the assurance of God's love and tenderness. The suppliant may even in such cases make known his wish, but he leaves the decision with God. Lest, however, we should fall into a state of indolent passivity, we ought to carefully consider what the Word teaches as to the extent to which we are to be left in the dark as to God's will, concerning any matter about which we may pray. Naturally our thought turns to Paul's declaration of (a) our infirmity in this regard, and (b) the way of escape therefrom.

“And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Rom. 8:26, 27, R. V.) Also see Jude 20, Eph. 6:18.

We have in this passage one of those rapid and abrupt transitions in thought, so characteristic of Paul; but it is evident from the opening words that there was in his mind a connection with what preceded. He was writing of the sufferings and privations which were the lot of the believer in this life, and of the anticipation of glory which made these sufferings not only endurable but desirable. How naturally did his mind pass to the thought of the wonderful things which God was willing, nay anxious, to bestow upon His children for the asking; and how the infirmity inherent in this earthly life stood in the way of their asking, because it prevented a clear discernment of these privileges. But as the Spirit had implanted in his breast that hope which sustained him in patient waiting for the completion of his redemption, so “in like manner” would the Spirit reveal what glorious gifts God had to bestow even now, that he might ask and receive them, or would himself ask for their bestowal.

It will be admitted that we should be very careful about resting the determination of any great question concerning our spiritual life, its duties, and privileges upon isolated texts.

There has always been too great a tendency to support doctrines with proof texts, and to put into such texts meanings which their relation to their context does not warrant. In view of this tendency, I approach with caution a class of most striking passages relating to the conditions upon which answers to specific prayer seem to be absolutely assured.

I have confidently affirmed that God hears and answers the feeblest heavenward aspirations of the wandering and rebellious child; but some words of caution or explanation should be added, lest this statement be misunderstood. These feeble askings may be prompted by comparatively low motives, by a desire to escape from present evil, or from a sense of punishment deserved and dreaded,

but they must be honest. There must be a recognition of spiritual need, and a looking toward a spiritual God for supply of that need. The *making* of prayers is not a prayer, but is only the pretence or mockery of prayer. Such *prayer-making* is only heard, that it may add to the weight of condemnation resting on the guilty soul.

“They which devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers; these shall receive greater condemnation.” (Mark 12:40, R. V.)

Nor are the self-righteous heard, for their prayers are rather self-gratulations at what they conceive themselves to be.

“And he spake also this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought: Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners,

unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner. I say unto you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14, R. V.)

No, what God requires as the fundamental condition of acceptable prayer is a spiritual worship and an honest worship.

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers." (John 4:23, R. V.)

But He also requires even of His believing children that the things sought shall not minister to the gratification of inordinate affections (lusts) or gratifications of self *in any form*.

“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures.” (Jas. 4:3, R. V.)

Suppose that any one seeks an exalted state of grace only, or chiefly, that he may *enjoy* it, is not that an asking “amiss,” that he may spend it in his pleasure? in the selfish and exclusive enjoyment of that which is designed to fit him to lead others to possess that to which he has attained?

That some may be deceived through a false zeal and apparent success in God’s cause into a belief that they have been heard and accepted is apparent from experience, historical instances, and particularly from Christ’s own words.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out devils, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess

unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matt. 7:21, 23, R. V.)

I have presented these negatives that the affirmative declaration to which I have alluded, and which is now to be set forth, may be thrown into stronger light.

I have elsewhere discussed the privilege or right of prayer enjoyed by those who have become entitled to ask *in the name of Christ*. Now I set down for consideration something of what the Holy Spirit has said respecting the assurances of answers to prayer, arising from personal righteousness. The man born blind whose eyes were opened by Jesus rightly understood that God would not, could not, confer the power to work such a miracle in answer to the prayer of “a sinner.” He said with the utmost confidence: “We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do his will, him he heareth.” (John 9:31, R. V.)

But these, you say, are not the words of

Christ or an inspired writer. Doubtless it is true that God does hear the prayer of the righteous, but does it follow that He will grant what is prayed for? What is the inspired answer to this question? The angel said to Cornelius: "Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God." (Acts 10:31, R. V.)

We know that hearing in this case was followed by the granting of the thing asked. The whole narrative shows that Cornelius was righteous up to the measure of light he enjoyed, and that he was seeking to know God perfectly, being also "willing to do His will." The truth was what he sought and the truth he obtained at the cost of Peter's long journey and to the overthrow of that apostle's deep-rooted prejudices.

The citation of the following passages without comment seems quite sufficient to a clear presentation of the teaching on this point. Only let us note how the order of arrangement of these texts brings the

teaching to a fitting climax in Christ's own words:

“For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears unto their supplication.” (1 Pet. 3:12, R. V.)

“The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.” (Jas. 5:16, R. V.)

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” (1 John 3:21, 22, R. V.)

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” (John 15:7, R. V.)

By these words of our Lord we are shown how righteousness is obtainable, how obedience becomes possible. Only through a vital union with Him, and only by having His blessed revealed will wrought in us is such righteousness obtainable and such obedience possible, as *entitles* the disciple to

ask *whatsoever he will* with the assurance that "it," not something else, will be done unto him.

[Having throughout this work endeavored to keep within the lines of sober exposition, I shall now for a brief space venture upon what may seem a bit of very fanciful interpretation.

We may take in their fullest literal meaning the words of Christ before cited.

"Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and He shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that 'thus it must be?'" (Matt. 26:53, 54, R. V.)

Although such a prayer as Jesus suggests would have been answered, even to the entire overthrow of God's plan, yet we know that He could not have prayed such a prayer. Now let us turn to another picture of God's dealing with His servant. Let us hear Moses' own account of how God dealt with him. "And I besought the Lord at that time, saying, O Lord God, thou hast

begun to show thy servant thy greatness, and thy strong hand: for what god is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works and according to thy mighty acts? Let me go over, I pray thee, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and hearkened not unto me: and the Lord said unto me, let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan." (Deut. 3:23, 27, R. V.)

God had been wroth with Moses for his impatience and arrogance, and had sentenced him to exclusion from the promised land. Moses, now restored to favor, prays that he may be permitted to go over, but it does not suit God's purposes for His people to reverse the sentence. His righteous servant pleads. God must deny, or must

thwart His own will or must stop the importunity, and this last He does by the command: "Speak no more unto me of this matter;" and the righteous servant, apprised of his Father's will by this command, obeys and *willingly* suffers God to bury him in the brow of the mountain of vision.

Whether this incident will or will not bear the interpretation I have suggested, we may clearly reach much the same conclusion from a proper consideration of other passages of Scripture. The "true unit of being in power in this world," says Phillips Brooks, "is God and a man." So far as concerns the world of men, of their industries, their achievements, social order and government, and their individual development, moral and intellectual, this is certainly true. God places in our hands the means to accomplish this purpose, the forces with which we can achieve the highest good, and realize the utmost possibilities of our being, in all departments of life. So far as

we come to understand these forces, and how they may be used, and will so use them as to work out the Creator's purpose, just so far will we succeed. Mr. Brooks has also said that there are three factors in a man's life: what he knows, what he is, and what he does; and that the value of the first and last is determined by the middle term. Given a knowledge of God's will, which we may have by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and our success will be in exact proportion to the extent to which our wills are in harmony with, at one with, the will of God. Dean Chadwick in his exposition of Mark 11:20, 25, says: "And the same rule covers all the exigencies of life. One who truly relies on God, whose mind and will are attuned to those of the Eternal, cannot be selfish, or vindictive or presumptuous. As far as we rise to the grandeur of this condition, we enter into the omnipotence of God, and no limit need be imposed upon the prevalence of really and utterly believing prayer. The wishes that

ought to be refused will vanish as we attain that eminence, like the hoar-frost of morning as the sun grows strong." (Gospel of Mark in the Expositor's Bible; Armstrong, N. Y., p. 306.)

This may seem strong, but it is clearly warranted by those texts which we have been considering.

VII.

ASKING IN THE NAME OF CHRIST.

“And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily I say unto you, if ye shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in my name. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled. In that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you.” (John 16:23, 24, 26, R. V.)

Cognate to these statements and promises is John 15:15, 16, R. V., therefore we will consider them together: “No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you. Ye did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go

and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you.” (See also John 14:13, 14.)

You will recognize them at once as parts of our Lord’s last address, recorded only by John, and ending with the prayer for His disciples and “for them also that believe on me through their word.” (John 17:20, R. V.)

It is evident that much of this whole discourse must be held to relate to a time when the disciples should be brought into a more perfect relationship with Christ and the spirit and work of the kingdom than they then were. Though our last text is in the present tense, the first one was plainly spoken of a time when, after they have sorrowed over His departure, they are restored to joy, nay brought to a greater joy, a continuing and never-ending joy, by His return. To the period after His resurrection is this assurance and promise referred, evidently to the same time when the promise

of the Comforter was to be fulfilled; and since the assurance that He had made known (or would make known) to them all that He had heard from the Father was made on the eve of His departure, it follows that even this must find its greater fulfillment in that aftertime, when the Holy Spirit should abide in them and be in them (John 14:17), and should take of Christ's and declare it unto them (John 16:14.)

In other words, these assurances were dependent for their fulfillment upon the disciples attaining to such relationship with the Father and through the Spirit, that they were entitled to ask "in His name."

What is it so to ask? Probably many have a very vague idea; have scarcely given a thought to its meaning, and that very many treat it as a sort of formula of conjuration. Indeed, do we not all rather think of the form of words as something to call up supernatural aid? We may be helped to discern the full meaning of the exhortation to ask "in His name" by the consider-

ation of a passage in Colossians (chap. 3:17, R. V.)

“And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Note carefully the connection. Paul exhorts his Colossian brethren to mortify their members; that is, put down certain fleshly inclinations that led to the commission of sin; then to put on holy affections brought to perfection in an all-embracing and supreme love. To this they were to add in an ever-ascending scale the rule of Christ's peace in their hearts and the wisdom which comes from a knowledge of His word, and to these he adds: “And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” That is to say, these holy affections, this supreme love, this abiding peace, and this heavenly wisdom will entitle you to act and speak as Christ's representatives; “in His name.” The writs of the courts of Great Britain run in the Queen's name; those of this country in

the *name of the people*. It is the Queen of England, the People of the State of Illinois or of the United States that command, not the petty magistrate who signs the writ.

But this right to speak, do, and ask in His name, this right of representation, rests not upon appointment but upon relationship. The steps by which this relationship is attained, its nature, its culmination, and its completeness, we would do well to consider as set forth in God's Word.

First, we have the promise that this relationship shall be established.

“And it shall come to pass that, in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.” (Hos. 1:10, R. V.)

His people had wandered so far from Him, that He had been constrained to declare that He had cast them off, and that they were no longer His; but the time would come, not alone of restoration but of a lifting up to a more perfect sonship.

“But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12, 13, R. V.)

In this text we see the conditions upon which God will establish this relationship; reception or acceptance and belief “on His name.” Here the word “name” stands, as it does in all these passages we are considering, for substantial power and authority, so we might paraphrase the text thus: To them who believe that God has the power and authority to make them His sons, and who accept His power and authority to do so upon them would be conferred sonship as a matter of right. We see also here that this relationship is to be established from the root up, as it were. He who is to have this sonship is to receive it as a birthright, and is from the very beginning of his spiritual life to know God as his Father.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of

God, these are sons of God. For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him," (Rom. 8:14-17, R. V.)

"But I say that so long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bond-servant, though he is lord of all; but is under guardians and stewards until the term appointed of the father. So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world: but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So

that thou art no longer a bond-servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God." (Gal. 4:1, 7, R. V.)

"But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and His love toward man, appeared, not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:4, 7, R. V.)

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." (1 John 3:1, 2, R. V.)

Curious and interesting as are the verses last cited, it is outside my present purpose

to attempt a complete exegesis of them. It might be well, however, in passing to enter a *caveat* against the extreme view of the meaning of "adoption." The word is used by Paul alone, and by him only five times. From the variation in the context it is clear that he does not attach a very exact meaning to the word; for instance, in Rom. 8:23, he speaks of the resurrection as our "adoption, to-wit, the redemption of our body." Certainly he can have no reference to anything analogous to the legal right of adoption. In Rom. 9:4 "adoption" is spoken of as one of the possessions of his "kinsmen after the flesh." Surely all they had was by birthright. In Eph. 1:15 the meaning is doubtless much the same as in our texts. In these Paul does not mean to say that we, when we were sinners, were shut out of the Father heart of God, but rather that we had voluntarily submitted ourselves to a bondage to Satan and sin, and that when we return it is fitting that we should first take the place of a servant. Thus the prodigal

sought only a servant's place. He counted confidently on obtaining that, not doubting that enough of the father's love was left to give it to him, but being willing thus to humble himself, and having that much of faith, he found the father's love, oh, so much greater than he could have conceived of, and knowing *now* that the father's heart had been grieving over him during all the years of his wandering, the spirit in him would indeed cry out: "Abba, Father!" FATHER! FATHER! much more than father.

Now, then, is the new relationship not a mere legal one in which there may be, nay are, differences, rebellions, all sorts of unfilial feelings and conduct, but one in which through regeneration and renewing by the Spirit of His one perfect and true Son, we have the spirit of sons, and have become so like Him that the world no longer knoweth us, "because it knew him not."

But even this is not enough. John, after declaring "now are we children of God," adds, "and it is not yet made manifest

what we shall be.” I shall not attempt to raise the veil that was not lifted for the Beloved Disciple, but will consider one other relationship, or perhaps we might say, an extension of sonship.

In His High Priest’s prayer in the presence of the eleven and for them and those who should believe through their word, Christ must have prayed for the highest attainable blessing and privilege; and this is what He prayed:

“That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: * * * * That they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one” (John 17:21,22, R. V.); and again “That the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26, R. V.)

After the consideration of these verses with those relating to sonship, need we fail to understand what it is to ask *in His name?*

What ! when believers are brought together in a bond, a union, so close, so sacred, so unalterable as that between the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son, a union expressed and expressable only as inwrought, indwelling, informed; and when with the indwelling Christ the disciple has also wrought in him the love with which the Father has eternally loved the Son, can they, can He ask anything of that Father that He will not do ?

VIII.

OF IMPORTUNATE PRAYER.

I approach this subject with hesitation, and shall speak about it with diffidence, because I run counter to the belief of so many respecting it, especially in my own denomination. (Methodist.)

I understand that the current of opinion is that God withholds answers to prayer, that the suppliant may be compelled to persevere in asking; that He requires earnestness in prayer to be evidenced by importunity, and for that reason *seems* to be unwilling to grant what is asked, and that He finally yields to such importunity, so as to encourage that mode of praying. This view is based (1), on the two parables we are about to consider; (2), upon the exhortations to unceasing prayer (1 Thes. 5:16-18, etc.); (3), upon Scripture example, and the experience of illustrious Christian saints.

This last-mentioned evidence of the correctness of this view may be disposed of in a few words. We have the record of Daniel's three weeks of prayer, and Daniel was named by God's messenger as one "greatly beloved," but this same messenger also said to Daniel: "For from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to humble thyself before thy God, thy words were heard: and I am come for thy words' sake." (Dan. 10:12.)

We are told that many dear children of God have spent many consecutive hours, or even days, in an agony of prayer for some specific thing, and during all this weary time the heavens have seemed as brass, and God has seemed to be deaf to their entreaties: but at last they have been gloriously answered. Was this waiting and this agony needed? If so, why? Is it because God has so ordered? or is it not rather because false conceptions have kept these children of God from *taking* what the father-heart was anxious to bestow? Earnestness is in-

deed a prerequisite to prevailing prayer, but what is required is that the suppliant be as earnest in accepting a supply for his needs as in feeling the needs and in asking for such supply.

But I am aware that a surface view of the parables of the importunate friend and the unjust judge seems to support the common view, and that the view I have presented will not be accepted without adequate explanation of these parables. Let us proceed, then, to their consideration.

I append to the text of each of these parables the verses that follow, as greatly aiding us to a right interpretation of the parables:

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine is come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me

in bed; I cannot rise and give thee? I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. And of which of you that is a father shall his son ask a loaf, and he give him a stone? or a fish, and he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:5-13; see also Matt. 7:7-11.)

"And he spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, and

regarded not man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came oft unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming. And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night, and he is long-suffering over them? I say unto you, that he will avenge them speedily. Howbeit when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1, 8.)

I have placed the two parables together, because they are usually so coupled; but to my mind they require very different treatment.

In the consideration of the first we hardly know which is the more despicable—the brutal selfishness which impels the one to refuse, or the shameless persistency of the

other. Let us carefully note the circumstances: First, the need, while doubtless great, is not imperative. The friend, come from a journey, might be uncomfortable, if compelled to go supperless to bed, but there is no intimation that he was near the verge of starvation; and he might well wait until morning, and should be satisfied that his friend had done all that hospitality demanded, although he should return empty-handed. We would naturally think that so absolute a refusal would have shut out the possibility of even one repetition of the request, but, on the contrary, we are told that the boon is granted because of his importunity, literally "shamelessness," for such is the force of the original.

But even more strange is the churlishness of the refusal. The excuse is a very weak one. Some have attempted to explain it by supposing that the refusal was based upon the fear that a thief or robber was simulating the voice of a friend, that he might effect an entrance into the house, but

there is not a hint of such fear in the narrative. The fact is that the refusal resulted from a petty selfishness that rather staggers our belief that he could be a *friend* to anyone save self.

It goes without saying that this cannot be a picture of any possible relationship between God and His believing child. No one would think for a moment that our Father could even *seem* to treat prayer in such a churlish spirit, and almost equally impossible would be such shameless importunity. What, then, is the lesson of the parable? It seems to me that it is a parable not of likeness, but of contrast. The key to it lies in the verses that follow. Like them, it reasons from the worse to the better. If the shameless importunity of the midnight knocker prevailed with his selfish and churlish neighbor, so much that he arose and gave what was requested, how much more will the reverent, humble, and believing prayer of a child of God prevail with a loving and gracious Father. Yet it

is well to repeat that perseverance and earnestness are essential to prevailing prayer, but not a mere earnestness in the use of words, not a perseverance in repetition. "Use not vain repetition," said Christ, "for you shall not be heard for your much speaking," as the Gentiles think they will be. The earnestness demanded is an earnest sense of need and an earnest desire to supply that need from the only source of supply, and the perseverance, or rather persistence, required is that of a firm, tenacious, and immovable faith.

The verses that follow this parable (verses 9-13) are almost identical with Matt. 7:7-11, which, as is well known, form part of the Sermon on the Mount. Now that same sermon contains the warning I have mentioned against vain repetitions, and gives this reason, "for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:8). These things He stands ready to bestow the instant we are prepared to receive them. It is not

prayer that will prepare us, but the preparation must precede the prayer which is the expression of it. Our Father desires to bestow the largest gifts and most exalted blessings, but they can be granted only to those fit to receive and retain them. We must be in a high state of holiness to realize the condition of abiding in Christ, and having His truth abiding in us; but when that condition is attained, we may ask *what we will* with the complete assurance that it (not something else) is God's will, that He knows our need of it, and will bestow it upon us in such way and at such time as will be for our highest good. Having received this assurance, would it not be an insult to return with a repetition of the request? Is God a man, that He should forget? Is He unfaithful? Have His resources failed?

We come now to the consideration of the second of these parables—that of the unjust judge.

We are met at the outset by the declaration of the evangelist as to what the Master

intended to teach. Such a statement is so unusual, that we are bound to seek for the reason of its introduction here. Why are we not left, as in most other instances, to interpret the parable and discover its lesson or lessons? Obviously because the picture left unexplained might mislead. Having this authoritative interpretation we are shut up to it and clearly have no right to add to or subtract from that interpretation. It is to teach *us* that we “ought always to pray, and not to faint.” The joining together here of the affirmative and negative is significant. Not only does this parable show why believers should pray, but also that they should not faint. The word here rendered “faint” means an utter giving out, *caving in*, pointing to complete discouragement. Now what could produce such discouragement as to prayer but failure to receive the answer? and, clearly, this agrees with the picture. We should expect the widow to be discouraged by the absolute refusal of the judge to grant her the meas-

ure of justice she sought, especially as she knew his character, but whether she knew it or not, it was these precise defects of character in the judge, coupled with her persistency, that were to win her case. If the judge had cared for his reputation, having once decided against her, he would have adhered to his decision, and refused to yield to an importunity which had even become railing (so rendered by Tyndale), or "brow-beating" (which seems to be the force of the original). But because of his indolence, selfishness, lack of conscience, and carelessness about reputation, he does yield and grant the justice prayed for. Thus the "judge of unrighteousness." How about the ever righteous Judge? His dearly beloved, the elect, are crying out to Him day and night for justice against their adversary; and if this justice is *delayed*, will they not come to think it is *denied*, and become utterly discouraged, and cease to pray? Now what is the meaning of the parable? It seems very clear to me that it teaches

that for at least one specific thing believers are to pray continuously; that the answer to this prayer will be so long delayed that they will be in danger of becoming completely discouraged respecting it. What are we thus to pray for? The answer is to be found in the context and in the surrounding circumstances. This is evidently part of the discourse commencing with verse twenty of the preceding chapter. Jesus has answered the question of the Pharisees respecting the time of the coming kingdom, and follows out the thought suggested thereby in a talk to the disciples in regard to last things. He briefly outlines some of the tremendous events of that time. He dwells upon the thought of its unexpectedness and of the lack of preparation for it which will then be made manifest. Men would cease to look for it, because they would cease to desire it. Ceasing to desire, they would become careless as to the requirements to meet it. They would be surprised at its suddenness, and no less surprised to

find themselves unfitted for it. Yet it must be delayed, that God might work out His gracious purposes in the world; and the apathy of the church on this subject would lengthen out the period of waiting. Nothing will keep the church pure, nothing will maintain the standard of efficiency but a consciousness of the presence of Christ. (cf. 2 Pet. 3:11.) The work of the Holy Spirit in the church is to keep alive this consciousness. Let the Holy Spirit be admitted to our hearts to do its office work, and Christ will seem to be as much with us as if His bodily form was within the reach of our physical vision, and there will be a constant expectation and desire that He may return to earth in bodily form. This state of expectation was in the early church. The apostles and their immediate followers seem to have remained gazing up into heaven as they did on the Mount of Ascension, as if they looked each moment to see the cloud part to reveal their descending Lord. The result of such constant ex-

pectation was that He seemed ever near to them. He was just beyond that dome of blue that arched above them. They might at any moment hear His voice as they had heard the Father's voice on more than one occasion "from the excellent glory;" hence they were constantly saying, "The Lord is at hand," "The end of all things is at hand," and such like things.

With this consciousness of His nearness, and their belief in the imminence of His coming, there must have been a constant growth in them of all the heavenly virtues. Their zeal would be intensified, and their efforts become untiring to advance the coming of that kingdom which was to bring with it all glorious consummations.

These early disciples felt that they were citizens of another country; that in this world they were not only aliens, but strangers among a hostile people. "The world hateth them, because they are not of the world," Christ had said; and so long as they retained the consciousness that they

were not of the world, just so long would they be conscious of the world's hatred. It would be their adversary against whom they would cry to the Judge to be avenged. Against their other adversary, the devil, would they also beseech judgment. The Judge will seem to be slack concerning his promise, "as some count slackness," for He must be long-suffering, "not wishing that any should perish." (II. Pet. 3:9.)

Here comes in the peril to which the church is subjected, because of this delay. Men will go about saying: "Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (II. Pet. 3:4, R. V.) The church will listen, will begin to doubt, will grow apathetic on the subject, will begin to compromise with its adversary, the world, and the end will be an abandonment of that loyalty to the unseen King and His unseen kingdom, which is the one essential foundation of religious life and character. How

can the consummation of the work of the kingdom be so long delayed, as it must be, and believers be saved from this deadly peril? First, they must be deeply impressed with the fact that the end will come suddenly, unexpectedly, with no herald of its approach, no certain sign by which its advent can be predicted; and second, by teaching that prayer for its coming is to be constant, and, lest it become formal, or mere vain repetition, importunate and urgent. Hence, in the form of prayer which Jesus taught His disciples, and which is evidently a form for daily use, we find the petition, "Thy kingdom come."

Array a troop along a picket line, and pass the word along the line that their officers are in momentary expectation of an attack from the enemy, and there will be little danger that any sentinel will sleep on his post. But in the conduct of a campaign this expedient to secure vigilance could not often be resorted to, yet vigilance is essential to the safety of the army and

the success of the cause which it supports. This is secured by the practice of sending a superior officer from post to post to observe the conduct of the sentinels. He comes silently. He may come at any hour of the night; and woe to the sentry who allows himself to be surprised or found off his guard in the presence of the enemy by the "grand rounds." The penalty can not be less than death.

Something like this expedient is that provision of the government of Christ's kingdom which seeks to keep alive an expectation of the speedy coming of our Lord.

I humbly submit that this conception of the meaning of this parable seems much more in harmony with the other teachings of the Word about prayer, than the common one that it was our Lord's intention to teach, that we are to importune, to "agonize" for the blessings and mercies we are in need of. What supports the latter view? First, we find it commonly rests, not so much upon the authority of the

Word, as upon the examples of *eminent saints*.

We are cited to a very numerous array of saintly men and women, who have obtained great blessings, and enjoyed wondrous gifts as the (apparent) results of long seasons of importunate and agonizing prayer. They have testified to great burdens of soul, from which they found no relief until after such exercise of prayer-making. We will not question their saintliness or their sincerity, but how about the simplicity of faith? Where in the Bible do we find any suggestion that importunity is needed to move God to answer, unless in the parables we are considering? and we see that they are clearly susceptible of another interpretation.

The second refuge of the advocate of importunate prayer is Paul's exhortation: "Rejoice alway; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you-ward." (I. Thes. 5:16-19, R. V.)

Now I am quite willing to take this verse as literally as may be demanded. I believe it to be the will of God that I should have something each moment to rejoice in; also that each conscious moment I should have something to pray for, and that in everything that comes to me I can find something to thank Him for. Who can count his needs? Some of the needs are constantly recurring; others are new, and even these are very frequent. Of many we are only dimly conscious, or not conscious at all, until God reveals them to us. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." (Matt. 6:8.) Many of these He will supply in the course of His general providence. "For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45, R.V.); but the deeper needs of our being He will not, can not, may we say, supply until we ask. We must have the consciousness of need, the soul-hunger, before we can be blessed and fed. What

avails it to force food upon one who is not hungry? It will only intensify his dislike and disgust.

Now let a believer become hungry for the things of God, and so many needs will come pressing in upon him, that he will not have time to ask again and again for the supply of one. He will just take each proffered blessing, and ask for and receive more. Needs will present themselves as boundless as the supply, and that is infinite. "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." (Phil. 4:6, R. V.) "And my God shall fulfill every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19, R. V.)

O! that we might realize what our privilege is, what boundless capabilities and possibilities are ours, if we would but accept, if we would but be and achieve what it is God's will we should be and do; then would we "pray without ceasing,"

and in everything make our requests known to God for supplies for ever-recurring and ever-growing needs; and with this unceasing prayer for such supplies would be *ever mingled* the petition: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done as in heaven so on earth.”

Our hearts, our minds, our souls would be in a state of blissful anticipation of, and earnest longing for that glorious consummation, and we would be earnestly prosecuting the work of the kingdom, the work which we are set to do, “while it is yet day.” “Howbeit when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith (this faith) on the earth?” (Luke 18:8.)

NOTE.

Believers in the necessity of importunate prayer point triumphantly to the incident of Jesus' interview with the Syro-Phenecian woman as proof most conclusive that importunity (by which many mean but little more than persistent repetition) is an almost indispensable condition of prevailing prayer.

The employment of this incident in support of such a doctrine compels us to attach to the conduct of Jesus on that occasion a meaning irreconcilable with such a character as he is generally admitted to have possessed. A belief that Jesus *feigned* a refusal while all along intending to grant the request, seems utterly inconsistent with the transparent sincerity of that character. Could He, who is "the truth," act a lie even for the loftiest purpose or the attainment of the most important end? If *acting a lie* seems too harsh a characterization of such conduct as is attributed to Him, still it seems impossible to believe that He, of all men, would be capable of *seeming* to act contrary to His inclination and purpose.

What, then, is the true explanation of the incident, and what lessons may we learn from it?

No explanation removes all the difficulties of an incident in which our Lord's conduct is seemingly so much at variance with his usual course. A careful survey of the circumstances seems, however, to point to some conclusions that are well-nigh irresistible. The woman was a heathen; a Canaanite; that race most abhorred by the Jews. She was not yet lifted above the Dead Sea level of heathenism. To her Jesus was a wonder worker;

endowed in some way with supernatural powers; in some poor unenlightened way she knew that the Jews were expecting the advent of a mighty deliverer, and she had evidently caught the echo of the rising belief in Galilee that Jesus was the Messiah. To her heathenish conception a God was a Being whose favor could only be won by persistent importunate repetition of prayers. (cf. Matt. 6:7.) Heathen prayers then as now often became frantic to the point of delirium, and are often accompanied by self-inflicted torture in proof of the sincerity and earnestness of the suppliant. (cf. 1 Kings 18:28.) With such conceptions in her mind no wonder that she was persistent in the face of most discouraging circumstances. But, however unenlightened, it is clear hers was an humble religious heart, and her maternal heart was so filled with unselfish love for her daughter that she made the case her own and was, for her sake, willing to take the position of an outcast, and to accept as belonging to her an appellation expressive of the uttermost contempt. A mother's invincible and irrepressible love sent her by one leap to the very core of Christianity, viz., complete self-abnegation; a vicarious surrender of self for the sake of good to be won for another.

The attitude of Jesus presents greater difficulties, but is not, however, incapable of reasonable explanation. That to the human consciousness of Jesus there was a gradual unfolding of the character and extent of His mission must be apparent to every careful student of the New Testament. "The dawning sense of the unique relation in which he stood to God comes out in his boyhood in the words addressed to his mother when he was found with the doctors in the temple," (Fisher's *Nature and Method of Revelation*, 82,) and the whole tenor of

the Gospel narrative makes it evident that this sense of oneness with the Father gradually developed into the conviction that He alone, in His divine-human nature, was the complete and only manifestation of God to mankind. It is no less apparent, however, that this conviction was not reached in the early days of His ministry. So with His mission. While from the first He looked upon the whole world as the Harvest from which should be gathered the sheaves for the Kingdom, it is beyond question that He considered that His personal work must be confined to the recovery of the "Lost sheep of the House of Israel." "Other sheep" He had who would hear His voice and by and by these would be "one flock," (See R. V.) but now He was the Shepherd of the Jewish Fold. From this point of view He was fully justified in closing His ears to the entreaties of even this stricken mother. If it be insisted that the refusal to hear was unjustifiably cruel, let it be remembered that "God's ways are not as our ways" and that His dealings with His creatures often present a surface aspect of cruelty until our horizon widens, when we are permitted to look out upon the Universe of God from the place where He dwells.

Another thought (for which, in extenso, see Geikie's *The Life of Christ*, Chap. 45,) which adds to the above explanation, has relation to the attitude of the Twelve. In estimating the conduct of Jesus on any occasion we must never overlook the very important consideration that much of His earthly work consisted of the teaching and training of these very narrow and bigoted and somewhat stupid pupils. Upon this foundation of the Apostles, Himself the corner stone, was the future Church to be built. Foundation building is the most important work in which God or man can engage. Well may

even the importunate demands of love be ignored rather than do harm to this growing foundation. Nothing had yet been done to remove from the minds of the Twelve a whit of their harsh Jewish prejudice. "That a foreigner, and above all, a Canaanite, accursed of God, should share His mercies, was as yet far too liberal a conception for them." * * * "The answer of Jesus seemed to favor this bitter exclusiveness. 'He was not sent except to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' They little knew that His help was kept back only in pity for His own nation, whom mercy to abhorred unclean Canaanites would embitter against Him to their own destruction." (So Geikie.) May we not add, carrying out the thought with which we have set out, that His help was kept back for fear that His work of foundation building might be marred.

Well was it for them; well for the Master's work; well for the world; well for us that a mother's love could not thus be baffled; that somehow there had been born in her heart "an irrepressible trust in Him whose face and tone so contradicted His words." (Geikie.) The harsh appellation of "dog" is sweetened into an expression of the tenderest love and pity by its humble acceptance, and the plea for the "crumbs", which would suffice for her needs, became thereby resistless. So she comes down to us in history as one of only two possessed of a faith worthy of special commendation. To the Twelve she taught the lesson, to be fully accepted only after lapse of many years and much trial of utter rejection by their brethren after the flesh, that heathen dogs, filled with the Divine Spirit of self-renunciation for others' good, were Abraham's true seed that is to be counted as the stars of heaven. To us comes the lesson that it is not importunity which in-

sure an answer, but rather complete self-abasement and humility accompanied by such a sense of need as leaves the heart wholly empty for receipt of the Divine gift. These appeal with irresistible force to the Father's heart and do indeed know no denial.

The above explanation of the conduct of Jesus is fully in accord with the views of Dr. Edersheim in his admirable work entitled "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah."

This view is also supported in whole or in part by other eminent authorities, among whom may be cited Dr. Bruce in "The Miraculous Elements of the Gospels;" Dr. Schaff and Prof. Riddle in "The International Illustrated Commentary;" Jamieson, Fausette and Brown in exposition of Mark 7:24-30. (The latter, it is true, see a double reason for Christ's silence; the second being the purpose to "try and whet her faith," etc. They, however, see plainly that this work of mercy was "beyond His strict commission," and this view is not inconsistent with that here expressed. The silence and harshness did bring out, perhaps "whet" her faith, patience and perseverance, and this would be the result whether Jesus was or was not willing at the outset to grant her request.) So also Bengel ("Gnomon of the New Testament") who seems to hold to the double reason, although he is not very clear.

Dean Chadwick, in his exposition of Mark 7:24-30, published as a volume in "The Expositor's Bible," says:

"Even the great champion and apostle of the Gentiles confessed that his Lord was a minister of the circumcision by the grace of God." * * * "Also it must be considered that nothing could more offend His countrymen than to grant her prayer." He thinks the disciples in their request that she be sent away, were

interceding for her and adds: "But Jesus was occupied with His mission and unwilling to go farther than He was sent."

We need not expect unanimity among learned expositors in their explanation of this incident. It must be admitted that many who are entitled to rank with those herein referred to take quite contrary views to those here expressed; although few, if any, suggest that the unwillingness of Jesus was *feigned*. It seems, however, impossible to explain His conduct without admitting either a real or pretended unwillingness. If the former, what other explanation is needed than His own words respecting His mission?

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